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“Implementing an Upcycled/Redesign Project in a Dress Theory Course”

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Key words: Dress, upcycling, meanings, sustainability

Purpose and innovative strategy. Within an undergraduate fashion program, there were a three gaps that were evident and the expectations were that a new project in a dress theory course could address all three gaps. These gaps include: (a) students have expressed interest in sewing but the current program focuses on merchandising, (b) in the past, meanings and motivations of dress were not highly emphasized in the dress theory course, which are important to understanding dress (Lennon, Johnson, & Rudd, 2017), and (c) previous semesters demonstrated that students had little to no knowledge about sustainability practices in the creation of garments, specifically that textile waste is a problem in the industry and materials can be reused to create new products (e.g., Hawley, 2008). The instructor decided to implement a new project for the dress theory course that would address the following three questions:

1. Can merchandising students be successfully introduced to basic garment construction methods?
2. Can an upcycled/redesigned garment project increase students' understanding of motivations and meanings in dress?
3. Will introducing students to the concept of sustainability, specifically reusing textiles to create a new garment and prevent waste, foster greater interest in sustainable design?

Implementation. Students began this project six weeks into the course, providing a preliminary foundation of dress concepts before starting the project. The requirement was for students to create a garment that was either upcycled, creating a new item from used textile materials (Brown, 2013), or redesigned, recreating old garments (Black, 2013). Students were encouraged to use this project to implement their own motivations and meanings into their garments. The project included three main components: (a) a garment that was upcycled or redesigned, (b) a PowerPoint presentation file, and (c) the oral presentation of the project. For the garment, students began by deciding on the type of garment to create and a specific target market. Students had to research inspiration and methods of construction for upcycling/redesign processes along with any decorative techniques they may choose to incorporate. Then base garment materials were selected for students' garments (e.g., tutus, men's ties, jeans, T-shirts, extra fabrics) and sewing supplies were chosen (e.g., needles, thread, zippers). Students were required to consult with the instructor before beginning their project. This consultation was a requirement to permit the instructor to assess the viability of students' project and discuss the design and construction process inclusive of potential problems and solutions. Two class periods were designated for students to work on their garments and receive instructor feedback during the process. The instructor brought in a variety of books about sustainable design methods for students to view during the first class period to aid in students' initial research process. Some students also took initiative and sought advice from the instructor outside of the class periods.

For the PowerPoint presentation, students (a) wrote a designer intention statement detailing their purpose and what they hoped to accomplish, (b) included inspiration images, (c) inserted photos of the original materials selected, (d) inserted photos of each step of the process as the new garment was created, (e) included images of the completed garment, (f) included a statement of outcomes describing the finished results of their garment, (g) typed a statement of learning, explaining what was learned throughout the project, and (h) added recommendations, advice for other students who may be interested in creating a similar garment or using a similar process in the future. Then students orally presented their work and showed off the upcycled/redesigned garment.

Results. The outcomes of the upcycled/redesign garment project were observed throughout the process by the instructor during the workdays in the classroom and student office visits, which demonstrated that merchandising students can successfully learn basic garment construction to complete a project. Students' comments within their PowerPoint slides and oral presentations yielded further insights into their projects. Student feedback showed that the upcycled/redesigned garment project increased students' understanding of the motivations and meaning in dress: (a) "I wanted to bring awareness to autism because I struggle with it. I want my jacket to remind people of autism (see Figure 1)," (b) "I wanted to use my old



Figure 1. Autism awareness jacket.



Figure 2. Skirt of men's ties.

dance costumes to create a ball gown to show my passion for dance and fashion," and (c) "My original idea was to create an entire dress with beaded fringe from men's ties. I wanted it to be a flapper dress. I liked the irony of creating a garment from another time period out of men's neck ties because it was ironic (see Figure 2)." During oral presentations, students expressed a desire to continue to experiment with upcycling/redesign methods in the future, which demonstrated this project was successful in fostering student interest in sustainable design.

Conclusions and Implications. The implementation of this upcycled/redesign project demonstrates that students learned basic sewing methods along with developing a deeper understanding of dress theory concepts and sustainability with a combination of research and hands-on experience. This new curriculum development for an undergraduate dress theory course also has implications for addressing gaps within other fashion courses or programs.

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